

SSR 2020-22

A Resolution in Support of Mandatory Excused Absences for Obligatory Religious Observances

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Vote: 22-0-0

Speaker Action:

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Ryan Frank - Speaker

Date

**WHEREAS**, a concerned student at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) brought to the attention of a Northern Iowa Student Government (NISG) Senator that UNI does not have a religious inclusion policy; and

**WHEREAS**, NISG would like to show support for all individuals on UNI's campus no matter their religious beliefs or affiliations; and

**RECOGNIZING**, the first pillar of the UNI's 2017-2022 Strategic Plan is Diversity and Inclusion, which explicitly states that UNI wishes to "build and strengthen relationships with underrepresented populations in Waterloo, the Cedar Valley, and Iowa to increase diversity," "Provide a diversity experience for all students, and deliver programs, services, and events to educate for and celebrate diversity on campus," and "Provide an inclusive decision-making process with broad communication and discussion"; and

**FURTHER RECOGNIZING**, students at UNI deserve to be protected and feel safe no matter their religious beliefs or affiliations; and

**FURTHER RECOGNIZING**, students should be allowed to openly practice their religion without negative consequences; and

**FURTHER RECOGNIZING**, many educational institutions across the nation, including Iowa State and University of Iowa, have religious inclusion statements; and

- Iowa State
  - <https://www.eoc.iastate.edu/how-can-we-help/religious>
- University of Iowa
  - <https://dos.uiowa.edu/policies/statement-of-religious-diversity-and-the-university-calendar/>

**FURTHER RECOGNIZING**, Student Policy 3.06 B2 lists "obligatory religious observances" as being excusable as determined by a faculty member; and

**FURTHER RECOGNIZING**, having such a policy is detrimental to students' well-being and academic performance; and

**FURTHER RECOGNIZING**, it goes against the first amendment right of free exercise of religion; and

**BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED**, NISG is calling for action that “obligatory religious observances” be placed in Student Policies 3.06 B1 under mandatory excused absences; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, The President of NISG address Faculty Senate regarding policy 3.06 B to identify possible solutions to protect the religious freedom of students; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the University of Northern Iowa release a religious inclusion statement that addresses the following list of criteria:

- A definition for *religious accommodation*
  - Example from *The University of Arizona*:  
“A religious accommodation is a change in work or school schedule or environment, or in the way tasks or assignments are customarily done, made to enable a student or employee to participate in his/her religious practice or belief without causing undue hardship to University operations or activities.”
- Steps for how to properly request a mandatory absence
- Recognition of all religious holidays, celebrations, observances, and practices as important and valid reasons to request an accommodation
- Outlined consequences for and necessary steps to take when a student request for proper accommodation is denied

; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, there should be at least two current UNI students present in the process of writing the religious inclusion letter; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, before a final version of the religious inclusion letter is published, it should be brought before NISG for approval; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, after a final version of the religious inclusion letter is approved, a copy of it should be sent out to all current UNI students, staff, faculty, and administration; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, a copy of this resolution is to be sent to the Office of the President, Office of the Provost, President’s Cabinet, University Council, and Faculty Senate.